

For further information about this service contact:

If you think you may require bereavement care contact your GP or one of the support groups listing on the Luton Borough Council website: www.luton.gov.uk (search for Bereavement Care)

This leaflet is sent from:

Luton Children and Adults Services
The Poynt
2-4 Poynters Rd
Luton
LU4 0LA

Useful Contact Details

Samaritans (Luton, South Beds and Harpenden)

Tel: 01582 720666 Email: jo@samaritans.org

Website: www.samaritans.org/branches/luton-south-beds-and-harpenden-samaritans

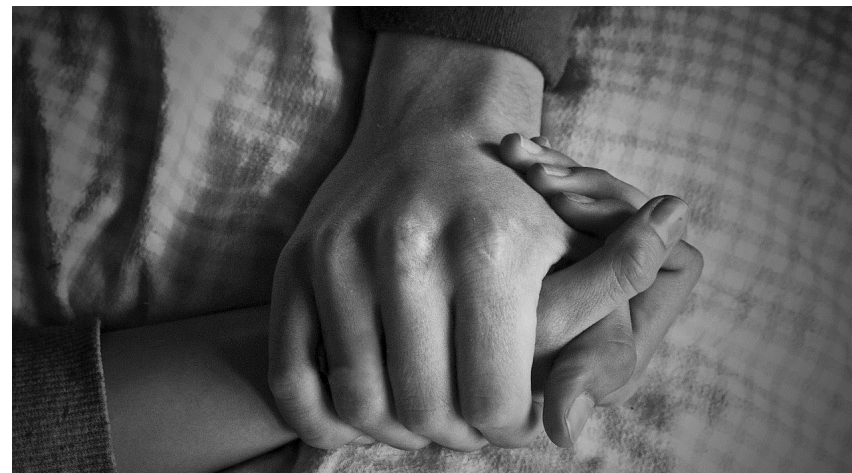
CRUSE Bereavement Care

Tel: 0808 808 1677 Website: www.cruse.org.uk

CHUMS (Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Service for Children & Young People)

Tel: 01525 863924 Email: info@chums.uk.com Website: www.chums.uk.com

Coping with Bereavement



If you require this information in a different format such as in large print or on audio tape, or in a different language please contact the service on the details above.

If you have any compliments about this service or suggestions for improvements, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service on 0300 131 1000 (charges may apply depending on your network) or email: ccs-tr.pals@nhs.net.

For free, confidential health advice and information 24 hours a day, 365 days a year please contact NHS 111.

You may find that you experience some confusing thoughts and feelings following any type of loss but especially if someone you know has died.

In our everyday life many of us do not have to deal with death and generally death is not talked about very much. Grief is something we learn about only when it happens to us or when we help someone who is grieving. However it is a natural part of life; how we react will be influenced by many things including our age, personality, family and cultural background, religious beliefs as well as how the death occurred and how much support we have.

In this booklet we hope to help you understand some typical feelings and responses to loss, how to help those who are struggling and how to know if help is needed.

When mourning becomes more difficult

Some people **return to normal life** quite quickly while others can suffer **repeated spells of depression or sadness or develop physical symptoms**.

Sometimes people can get **stuck** at any point in their grieving and may **need more help and support**. Help can be arranged for those who appear not able to adjust to their loss and change of circumstances.

“I think I need to talk to someone...”

Sometimes more help is required when particular thoughts, feelings or behaviours become prolonged:

- Sleepless nights become a regular problem.
- Sadness becomes depression – longer-lasting and nothing gives any pleasure any more, usually with sleep disturbance, poor appetite and loss of energy.
- Inability to think of anything other than the person who has died.
- Grief is causing difficulties at work or inability to work.
- Constant feelings of exhaustion and being ‘empty’.
- Use of substances such as drugs and alcohol.
- Inability to control anger.
- Physical symptoms and problems.
- Self-harming behaviours or suicidal thoughts.

Material taken from www.rcpsych.ac.uk

How can others help those who are grieving?

- **Spending time** with the person who is bereaved can be a great help **expressing care and support**.
- It is important that the bereaved person feels allowed **to cry** and **express their pain and distress** without being told they should pull themselves together or should be moving on now.
- Sometimes it can be **difficult to listen** to and understand why the bereaved person repeats the same thing over and over. Both the bereaved and those who support them can find this difficult but it is usually a way of **making sense of what has happened**.
- Often people don't know what to say and avoid mentioning the name of the dead person. The bereaved person may feel more isolated and sad because the dead person is not mentioned. **Talk honestly** to the bereaved person about how they think they can be best helped, giving them the opportunity to tell you what they prefer.
- **Anniversaries, birthdays and special occasions** are often difficult times for the bereaved, especially the **first ones**. Remembering them and being around for them at these times by being a **real comfort and help**.
- **Practical help** with new tasks that may now need to be learned can be helpful **and ease feeling of being alone**, eg help with childcare or advice about how to pay a household bill, cook a meal, get the car fixed can be a great **support**.

Coping with Bereavement

Grief

Grief is a natural reaction to loss and is always an individual experience. There is no 'right' way to grieve. You may experience going through a succession of different feelings or you may find there isn't any order to your thoughts and feelings which can fluctuate and recur, leaving you feeling confused. There can be 'good days' and 'bad days' or ups and downs within any given day. None of this is unusual.

Below are some common thoughts and feelings

"I can't believe this is happening".

In the first few hours and days, or even longer depending on the type of death, it is common to feel **shocked** or **stunned**. Even when the death is expected it may be hard to believe what is actually happening.

"I feel so numb".

This is often followed by a sense of **emotional numbness**. This can help people to get through the next few days and weeks and the practical arrangements that have to be made following a death. During this period, you, your family and friends may choose to see the dead person which can go some way to overcoming the feelings of unreality. Attending the funeral or a memorial service can be a helpful way to say goodbye.....

Once the numbness has worn off you may experience any of the following:

"I see him/her everywhere"

Even though you know logically that you will not see the person who has died again you may find yourself constantly searching for them, or expecting them to walk into the house at any moment. Sleep may be affected and dreams may be distressing. It may be difficult to relax or to concentrate. You may feel restless or anxious.

"Am I going mad?..."

The feeling of grief can feel so overwhelming and unfamiliar that people sometimes fear they are going mad. You may find yourself thinking that life has lost its meaning or purpose and wondering how you can go on. Death can bring a major upheaval to our lives and these feelings are part of adjusting to this. If you are having thoughts of harming yourself it is important to seek help from your GP as soon as possible.

“I feel so angry”

Sometimes feelings of **anger** can emerge. These may be directed towards doctors and nurse, family and friends, the person who has died, God, or everyone and anything. People who have religious beliefs may find their belief challenged. It may help to talk to these feelings through with a faith leader.

“If only I had...”

Guilt is also a common feeling: “if only I had said or done this, maybe the death could have been prevented.” Going over and over in your mind all the things that could have been said or done can be a torment. Even though death is usually beyond anyone’s control, this is not always remembered. Sometimes people feel guilty for feeling **relieved** that someone has died, particularly following a distressful illness.

“I feel so sad, so tired”

Grieving can be tiring and people sometimes want to be left alone with their thoughts and feelings. This can worry friends and relatives who may need reassurance that this is normal. **Spasms of grief** can be sparked by all sorts of things that bring back a memory and these can occur when least expected.

“I remember when...”

Thinking and reflecting on both the good and not so good times together can help people to come terms with what has happened.

“You will always be with me...”

As time passes the fierce **pain of the bereavement** usually begins to fade. Although there can be a feeling of a loss of part of oneself, and sadness and frequent reminders of the loss may continue, **looking forward** can become possible.

There can become a feeling of **‘being whole even when a part is missing’**. This becomes possible as you adjust to how the person who has died is now in your life in a different way. Sometimes you may find yourself talking to the person who has died which can be a comfort and help you to continue your relationship with the person who has died.

In time **sleep and appetite can improve** and an **energy return** to allow life to continue without ever forgetting the person who died.

There is no **“normal”** way to grieve and these are just some of the emotions and feeling which may be experienced; timescales can be different for different people.

Children and Young People

Adults often want to protect children from the pain and sadness of grieving. Although this is understandable it is neither possible nor helpful. Children can feel confused and often blame themselves. They need reassurance and careful explanation about what has happened and what will happen now. It is often achieved through play and creative activity. Explanations should be given in a way that they can understand, using words that are not ambiguous, for example using the word ‘dead’ rather than ‘lost’. Children appear to cope well when told in an appropriate way, often better than adults think they will. Sometimes the worry from the adult is whether they will be able to manage the children’s thoughts, feelings, questions and emotions on top of their own. However children and young people need to feel involved and be given the opportunity to say goodbye and talk about the person who has died. Tears, of both children and adults, can be a part of this. If it feels too difficult, perhaps there is someone else in the family, or the child’s teacher who can help. Informing teachers so that they are aware and can support the child during school is a good idea anyway.

Children are often said to grieve like **“jumping in and out of puddles”**, that is to say their **emotions** change frequently and suddenly, which adults do not always understand or find easy to deal with. A child may burst into tears one minute and the next say “can I go out to play now?” They are not being fickle or insensitive – this is how children grieve. Understanding this can make it easier for adults to manage.

Children up until the age of around 4 years may not understand the full meaning of death but it is clear they feel the **loss of a close relative**. Their grief is more likely to be displayed through their behaviour or in their play. Their behaviour may regress, eg may start bed wetting again, they may display separation anxiety or they may ask questions over and over. Keeping routines as normal as possible helps them to feel secure at a time of change. You may need to be patient as you have to keep explaining what has happened with children who cannot grasp finality of death because of their age. Their understanding of the loss will change as they grow. Older children and Young People may try to protect adults from their emotions, worrying that they may upset the grieving adult, and sometimes prefer to talk to a friend, or another family member.

Bereavement can be a life-changing experience with **a jumbling of thoughts and feelings** often causing **confusing and disorientation**. It is a natural part of life and usually does not require any special medical treatment but it can be painful and overwhelming especially in the short term.

Grieving takes time and it is important to allow enough time to grieve – it is often tiring and confusing and this can be the same for the bereaved and the supporter alike.